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THE CEREMONY

OF

TURNING TO THE ALTAR

DURING THE

REPETITION OF THE CREEDS ONLY,

CONDEMNED,

AS BEING UNAUTHORIZED BY THE RUBRICS,

AND

INCONSISTENT WITH THE USAGE OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH.

"ALL THE CLERGY OF ENGLAND SOLEMNLY PLEDGE THEMSELVES TO OBSERVE THE RUBRICS."

Dr. Hook's Church Dictionary.

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208.

BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

The Ceremony, etc.

The beautiful simplicity of the Liturgical Services of the Church comprised in the Book of Common Prayer indicates with how much care the labours of those who were entrusted with the task of compiling that formulary were directed towards promoting, amongst the members of the Church, the scriptural attainment of praying, as well with "the understanding" as with "the spirit."

In the furtherance of this object, ample directions were therein afforded in the Rubrics for the order of public worship, and in respect of such ceremonies as the Church required to be observed.

Thus it was provided that "all things should be done in decency and order." And the services of the Church were rendered truly Catholic by being placed on one uniform model. Her members likewise derived from thence the great benefit of being fully instructed in all her ordinances, so that there was no usage or ceremony which they might be called upon to observe which they could not bring to the test and authority of the Rubrics.

The theory of the Church, therefore, is evidently that of perfect uniformity in all her public services; notwithstanding which, however, there are, in many

churches, variations from the Rubrical directions, which are greatly to be deplored.

It may be alleged that some of these departures from the appointed forms are not of great moment. Different opinions, however, on this point, may be held by different persons; but granting that they are not, in themselves, of much moment, still the principle, which a departure from the appointed order of the Church involves, is by no means unimportant, since it infers a disregard to her discipline, and, moreover, violates the Catholicity of her services.

This is the opinion which the Church herself has expressed: for she has declared, that "although the keeping or omitting of a ceremony, in itself considered, is but a small thing, yet the wilful and contemptuous transgression and breaking of a common order and discipline is no small offence before God." "The appointment of the which order pertaineth not to private men; therefore no man ought to take in hand, nor presume to appoint or alter, any public or common order in Christ's Church, except he be lawfully called and authorized thereunto." Now this prohibition is not confined to lay members of the Church, but extends likewise to her clerical members—"As with the people, so with the priest:" for neither deacons, priests, nor bishops are individually called and authorized independently of the body of the Church duly assembled "to appoint or alter any public or common order" therein. And yet, notwithstanding this, it is nevertheless *the* case, that the "common order" of the

public services of the Church has, in some instances, been altered, by the adoption of a ceremony for which no warrant is to be found in the Rubrics, viz., the priest turning himself round to face the altar during the repetition of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Now, upon a review of the instructions which the Church has given, in the Book of Common Prayer, for the celebration of her public services, not the least indication can be discerned of her ever having designed this ceremony to be observed; but, on the contrary, it would seem that she rather discountenances the practice.

The Book of Common Prayer now in use is that which, upon the Restoration, was agreed and determined on jointly by the Convocations of the two provinces of Canterbury and York, after having been, as it is stated in the Preface thereto, examined with great diligence by those bodies. And it was not only the selection and composition of the prayers, and other portions of the written service, to which such examination was directed, but likewise to the mode of conducting public prayer and the ceremonies used therein. This appears from the account which is given in the Preface, of the object which the Convocations kept in view, being, as therein declared, amongst other things, "first, for the better direction of them that were to officiate in any part of divine service, which was chiefly done in the Calendars and Rubrics." To the Rubrics, therefore, one looks for instruction and information regarding the use of the ceremony in question, but therein nothing is to be found concerning it.

Moreover, had the Church ever contemplated its observance, some notice of it might reasonably be expected to be found in that chapter prefixed to the Book of Common Prayer, entitled, "Of Ceremonies, why some be abolished and some retained;" but neither therein does she say anything respecting it. She does, however, declare in that chapter, that what ceremonies she had retained were "neither dark nor dumb ceremonies, but were so set forth that every man might understand what they meant and to what use they served." And if the ceremony in question be tried only by the test here offered, its condemnation will at once be sealed: for, unquestionably, it is a dark and dumb ceremony, which the people do not understand —neither what it means, nor to what use it serves. It therefore involves an absolute negation of those purposes which the Church intended in those ceremonies which she retained. And that she never ordained its use, nor contemplated its observance, may be truly inferred from the fact, that, whilst other matters of less importance have been specifically noticed by her, upon this one she is totally silent. The vestments of the minister, the ornaments of the church, the place in which morning and evening prayer shall be used, have all been assigned by her; and it cannot be doubted, that, having exhibited so much care and strictness in her injunctions for the solemnization of divine worship, had she ever intended the observance of such a ceremony as this, assuming to itself, as it does, so much *solemn importance*, she would expressly have in-

structed her people in the use of it. And, moreover, from her having in the Rubrics prescribed when the priest and people shall stand and when kneel, had she intended any peculiar position of standing to be assumed in a particular part of the service, the inference is that she would have enjoined it. And this may be further inferred from the fact, that she actually has prescribed the position in which the priest shall stand at one part of the service. In the fourth paragraph of the Rubric prefixed to "the Order for the Celebration of the Holy Communion" it is directed that "the priest, *standing at the north side of the table*, shall say the Lord's Prayer, with the collect following;" and the Rubric at the end of that collect prescribes as follows—"Then shall the priest, *turning to the people*, rehearse distinctly all the Ten Commandments;" and the Rubric at the end of the Ten Commandments says—"Then shall follow one of these two collects for the Queen, the priest *standing as before*." And in the Rubric prefixed to the Nicene Creed, amongst other directions not affecting the question are these—"Then shall be read the Gospel, *the people all standing up;*" and further on the Rubric proceeds—"And the Gospel ended, shall be sung or said the Creed following, the people still *standing as before*." Now these directions in the Rubric are important, as showing not only that, when the Church intended that a peculiar position of standing should be assumed, she was careful to give explicit instructions for it, but as showing likewise, from the Rubrics themselves, that she has actually dis-

countenanced the practice in question. For although by them it is, in express terms, neither affirmed nor negatived, yet it will be observed, from the last two Rubrics which have been quoted, that, by implication, they are directly opposed to it. Observe the Rubric prefixed to the Nicene Creed: it charges the people to stand "as before." Now obedience to this direction must necessarily exclude the practice of assuming a new position during the repetition of the Nicene Creed, and which can therefore be done only by an infraction of the injunctions of the Church. Hence it seems to have been the clear intention of the Church that the congregation should preserve the same position of standing throughout the service, without changing it at particular portions; and she might probably have presupposed that this position would be in conformity with what was the custom of the ancient Church, viz., the faces of the whole congregation directed towards the altar throughout the entire service. Such, undoubtedly, was formerly the mode of worship; and the maintenance of one uniform order by the whole congregation being unquestionably more seemly and becoming, and better calculated to promote true devotion, the departure from the practice, both of the primitive Church and the Church in later times, cannot be too strongly deplored. It is not difficult to detect both the cause of this departure, and the period at which it took place: and in tracing the connexion between the alteration itself and the cause to which it may be assigned, there is disclosed the great danger

to true spiritual religion which every unnecessary departure from the sound principles and practice of the Catholic Church inevitably involves. The introduction or toleration of one evil will ever be found to be but the forerunner of another, destroying the just proportions, and defacing the beauty, of "the body the Church"—marring the spirituality of her worship, and furnishing plausible pretexts for multiplied schisms and profuse sectarianism.

The cause of the departure from the practice of the ancient Church in the order of standing by the congregation is undoubtedly to be found in the system, which has become common, nay, almost universal, since the Reformation, of pewing churches. Previous to that time, pews, according to modern use and idea, were not known; and enclosed pews were not in general use before the middle of the seventeenth century.*

In former days the only accommodation to be found in the churches for the congregation assembling within them were unenclosed seats, so placed in the same parallel direction as that the faces of the whole congregation should be directed towards the altar. Content with this rude furniture, the humble-minded Christians of those days, the rich as well as the poor, the noble of the land as well as his meanest vassal, all trod together the courts of the house of the Lord, and, merging worldly distinctions in the endearing ties of "brethren," engaged, side by side, in one united act

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* Dr. Hook's Church Dictionary. Title—*Pews.*

of social worship, proclaiming, as with one voice, the praises of Him who had "called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."

It must be confessed that, since these times, there has abated much of the genuine spirit, as well as the visible sign, of social worship; that the marked observance in the sanctuary of those conventional distinctions which prevail in the world has a direct tendency to impair and derogate from the genuine spirit of Catholic devotion must be admitted. It therefore was the spiritual policy of the ancient Church to exclude such distinctions from the temple of the Most High. It is not intended to affirm of the Church in later times that she has ever had in view the object of preserving them; nevertheless, it may be questioned how far she has sufficiently guarded against their intrusion. The direct effect of the internal arrangements of churches in modern times, and which have been both sanctioned and authorized by ecclesiastial authority, has been to introduce within the porch of the temple the same secular distinctions which prevail without. The pewing of the churches; the property which has been acquired in pews; their individual appropriation; the carpeting, and cushioning, and curtaining of them—all these things have tended to secularize the tabernacle of the Most High, and to mark distinctly and ostentatiously the several gradations of worldly rank; while the rude benches in the aisles—at one time the only seats for the peer as well as the peasant—now invidiously distinguish the occupants of them

as the poor and lowly of the parish. It must, however, be conceded, that, as regards the newly built and unendowed churches, enclosed pews and their individual appropriation are, to a great extent, unavoidable, unless the wealthy of the land could be stimulated to follow the pious example of their ancestors, by bestowing a competent portion of their riches in the endowment of these churches.

If, then, the ceremony of turning round to face the altar during the repetition of the Creeds is one for which the Church has given no directions, but which she has in the Rubrics by implication discountenanced, what is the authority upon which it rests? It has been treated, by those writers who have adverted to the subject, as a traditionary custom. Wheatley, in his work on the Common Prayer, mentions it only as being customary; but if it be a tradition, it is comparatively a very modern one. The ceremony was unknown to the ancient Church, as it is likewise to all other Churches except our own; and it has prevailed there only since the Reformation.

In the notes on the Rubrics prefixed to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, in Mant's Common Prayer Book, are collected the observations of various authors: they endeavour to explain, and for the most part to defend, the usage, by referring to the practice of the primitive Church; but inasmuch as the practice of the primitive Church was, as has been observed, to face the Altar throughout the entire service, it affords no precedent whatever to the practice referred to in

the English Church, and leaves altogether unaffected the propriety of adopting the position of facing the Altar during the repetition of the Creeds *only*. It is only by a forced conclusion that the propriety of this practice can be justified on the authority of the practice of the primitive Christians; and this seems to have been felt by a zealous advocate of it—Dr. Bisse, and who is one of the authors quoted in Mant's Book of the Common Prayer. He evidently saw that it was impossible to establish, upon any good foundation, the practice which he defended by resting it upon that of the primitive Church, from which it is so essentially dissimilar, and he therefore assumed a new, and it must be confessed, as far as it goes, a better, position. He created in its defence an argument out of his imagination—a poetical figure—and, connecting that with the practice of the primitive Church, he deduced an argument *à mùlto fortiori*, which however satisfactory it might have been to himself, seems nevertheless to be tinged too much with the liveliness of fancy to render it equally satisfactory to others.

After noticing that it was the custom of the ancient Church to turn to the Altar or East, not only at the confessions of faith, but in all the public prayers, and correctly arguing that such was the most honourable place in the house of God, answering to the holy of holies in the Jewish tabernacle; and that as the Jews worshipped lifting up their hands towards the mercy-seat, and even the cherubim were formed with their faces towards it; so the primitive Christians in

their worship look towards the Altar, of which the mercy-seat was a type. "But (proceeds Dr. Bisse), in rehearsing our Creeds, this custom is still more proper and significant; for we are appointed to perform it 'standing'—by this posture declaring our resolution to stand by or defend that faith which we have professed: so that at these times we resemble not so much an assembly as an army. As, then, in every well marshalled army, all look and move one way, so should we always do in a regular assembly; but especially at the confessions of faith all Christ's faithful soldiers should show, by this uniformity of gesture, that they hold the unity of faith."

Now, with due submission to so high an authority as Dr. Bisse, it is conceived that the observance of this ceremony, whilst rehearsing the Creeds, is less significant, and might with less impropriety be omitted than at any other parts of the public service: for that whereas this position of facing the East always has, both in the Jewish and Christian Churches, been regarded as the most becoming and appropriate in addressing the Most High in prayer and praise, and peculiarly significant of devotion; the assumption of it during the repetition of the Creeds only, is at that precise time when the occasion bespeaks less solemnity, and when devotional feelings are less excited, than at other parts of the service. The rehearsal of the Creeds involves no act of prayer or praise, and is in fact but a bare declaration of assent to the chief articles of the Christian faith. The Creeds themselves do not,

in their language, assume to be devotional. The Apostles' Creed consists simply of a brief recapitulation, in the plainest language, of those facts upon which the faith of the Christian Church is founded: the Nicene Creed, in language certainly more elevated than that of the Apostles' Creed, yet not rising into the tone either of prayer or praise, shortly explains those facts; while the Athanasian Creed enters more at large upon them. The Creeds, however necessary when first introduced into the Church, and however useful they have been since found in preserving the faith of the Church in its integrity and soundness, yet are by no means of the essence of Christian devotion. Indeed, a formal public declaration of faith formed no part of the public service of the first Christians; nor was there in the earliest age of the Church any such formulary as a distinct Creed. It might be thought otherwise from the title which one of the Creeds bears, viz., the "Apostles' Creed;" but it may be doubted whether that title is strictly applicable to this important summary of Christian faith, since there is no evidence that it was formally drawn up by the apostles themselves. The Church, therefore, in her eighth Article, with due caution describes it as that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed; nor is it surprising that it should have received that honourable appellation, when the apostolical doctrines it contains, and its high antiquity, are considered. Now, as the language of the Creeds does not assume them to be devotional, so neither was the intent of their introduction of a devotional purpose.

The Church, soon after the age of the apostles, was early infected with heresy, and all were desirous, notwithstanding their mischievous errors, to be within her pale; hence it became imperatively necessary to fence her in from such dangers. The use of the Creeds, therefore, according as each was fitted to meet the prevailing errors, was from time to time adopted into her public services, with the view, not only of giving formal expression to the true faith of the Church, but likewise of testing the soundness and orthodoxy in that faith of all her professed members. The public repetition of the Creeds in the face of the Church was more in the nature of a security to her, as regarded the faith of those whom she admitted into her communion, and who professed to be members of her, than of the performance of any act of worship towards God.

As, then, the ceremony in question is not cordially complied with even amongst those congregations where it is used; as it does not recommend itself to our approval by its primitive use; as it is not a Catholic observance; as our Church has given no instructions concerning it, but, moreover, evidently has, by implication, discountenanced it—all considerations concur to render it desirable that it should be totally laid aside.

There might be pointed out the positive injuries which it inflicts upon spiritual worship, in addition to the objections arising out of those considerations which have been adverted to; but, not to enter fully upon them, it may be observed, that, in those churches where this ceremony is practised, it is too plain not to be easily perceptible, that, in the performance of an

act which assumes to itself peculiar solemnity, there is frequently at that very time, the least devotional feeling: in truth, this ceremony is most frequently complied with merely as a custom which is in use, and not in obedience either to what the understanding enjoins or the heart prompts, which every act of worship to God, though it be but what is called a form, ought to be able to challenge—it is complied with merely as a custom, much in the same way, and in a similar spirit, as one is accustomed to comply with the conventional usages of society; and much less does the idea of Dr. Bisse, and which, nevertheless, is the best apology for the ceremony which has yet been made—much less does his idea ever enter into the imagination of any one.

Most desirable would it be if the ancient practice of the Church could be restored, and the churches so arranged that the whole congregation should maintain one uniform posture, with their faces towards the Altar, throughout the whole service; but as this, however desirable, is not at present likely to be generally attained, let us be content, and let us be scrupulous, in following the directions which the Church has afforded for the celebration of her services. In this way will be effectually excluded the encroachments which might otherwise be made upon the simplicity and integrity of her ordinances by warm and zealous, but indiscreet men of extreme opinions, and both her Catholicity and her discipline be preserved from that outrage which unauthorized innovations perpetrate upon them.

William Edward Painter, 342, Strand, London, Printer.